

## Language & Learning

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### Building Our Support Team

#### Setting Up School Support

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that your school system provide support for you and your baby. Part C of this Act discusses the assistance that is available for babies from birth to three years and their families. Your state has guidelines to help school districts provide services when you need them. A service coordinator is just one member of the school system that is available to you and your child thanks to the IDEA. He or she will work with you to find the right professionals to meet your needs. You have the choice to participate in early intervention, which can help you and the baby get a good start in communication.

An early intervention team, chosen by you and your service coordinator and based on your baby's special needs, may include several professionals. Often the team includes an audiologist, an ENT doctor, pediatrician, speech and language specialist, social worker, and early childhood special educator. The makeup of your team may vary as your developing child's needs change.

As your child's advocate, you will be the most important member of the team. You can let your services coordinator know your preferences, and attend Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) meetings to ensure the educational plan for your baby and your family meets your needs.

An IFSP is required by IDEA. This is not a plan solely for your baby, but for your entire family. It is developed by you and your team, based on your family's strengths and needs. In the past, professionals have made many of the decisions for families and children with hearing loss. Today, with the IFSP, the professionals now consider the needs of families and make decisions with them instead of for them. Professionals recognize that babies spend most of their time with their caretakers, that every family is different, that the beliefs and values of every family are important. Professionals are committed to respecting families and their choices.

The IFSP process helps parents too. When your child is ready for preschool, you will already know how to work with a team of professionals to create the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) required for children age three and older who are deaf or hard of hearing. You will expect that team to pay attention to you as a family, rather than just to your child. As a result of your child's IEP, you will be able to advocate for your child as he or she grows up and continues to learn and develop.

To learn more about sources of professional support for you and your baby, refer to Family-Centered Service Coordination:

A Manual for Parents, by I.N. Zipper, C. Hinton, M. Weil and K. Rounds (Copyright 1993), and published by Brookline Books, P.O. Box 1046, Cambridge MA 02238-1046.

For more information about your service coordinator and other school support, refer to the Getting Started section of [Babyhearing.org](http://Babyhearing.org).